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SECTION: LOCAL, Pg. 5B**LENGTH:** 814 words**HEADLINE:** Anselm Sodaro, 91, city's chief **judge** and state's attorney**BYLINE:** Jacques Kelly and Frederick N. Rasmussen**SOURCE:** SUN STAFF**BODY:**

Anselm Sodaro, Baltimore's former chief **judge** who as a prosecutor won a stunning conviction in the 1952 Grammer murder case, died of cancer Sunday at Gilchrist Center for Hospice Care. He was 91 and had lived in Towson for a decade.

He was the city state's attorney from 1950 to 1956, winning national attention for sending a Northeast Baltimore man to the gallows for murdering his wife in what was dubbed "the almost perfect crime."

Gov. Theodore R. McKeldin, a Republican, picked **Judge Sodaro**, a Democrat, to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City – now the Circuit Court – in 1956, and he remained on the bench for nearly 35 years.

"He was an excellent state's attorney and made a very, very fine **judge**," said former Gov. Marvin Mandel, who appointed him chief **judge** of the Supreme Bench in 1975. "He had the perfect judicial temperament – a calm disposition – and he never lost control of his emotions when trying a case. He always presented that demeanor. He decided his cases on a fair and an even basis."

From 1975 until he retired in 1980, **Judge Sodaro** served in three capacities: chief **judge**, administrative **judge** and working trial **judge** with a full caseload.

"He had a booming voice with a sing-song lilt," recalled retired **Judge** Elsbeth L. Bothe. "He was smart but was no intellectual. And he had few doubts. Being a **judge** was not hard for him."

"He was one of the last gentlemen – he was known for being professional and civil – who did a lot for the circuit. He was a giant man although he stood short," said Maryland's Chief **Judge** Robert M. Bell of the Court of Appeals. "He was around when the Supreme Bench adopted affirmative action. It was under his leadership that it got passed."

Judge Sodaro also hired the city's first black prosecutor when he named George H. Rosedom an assistant state's attorney in 1954.

"He was the kind of **judge** the lawyers liked and respected. All the lawyers wanted to be in his courtroom," said Joseph F. Murphy Jr., chief **judge** of the Court of Special Appeals. "There was a virtual stampede to be assigned to his courtroom."

"Recognizing that, he was the **judge** that we all aspired to emulate. He never forgot he was a litigator. He could maintain complete control of his courtroom without raising his voice. He had a mild-mannered, calm, even-tempered voice and personality.

"When sentencing, he was a heavy-hitter. The ones who should have been sent away for a long time got sent away for a long time. But he never engaged in a personal attack."

State Comptroller William Donald Schaefer, a former City Council president, mayor and governor, said, "When he came before the City Council, he gave you straight answers. You didn't have to play games with him. He was respected by all."

Anselm Sodaro, 91, city's chief judge and state's attorney The

Born in Sicily, **Anselm Sodaro** was 5 when he arrived at Ellis Island with his family in 1916. The **Sodaros** settled in Govans, where his father, a skilled cobbler, had a custom shoemaking and repair business on York Road.

Judge Sodaro was a 1927 graduate of City College and earned a bachelor's degree from Loyola College in 1931. He graduated from the University of Maryland School of Law in 1934 and was admitted to the Maryland bar that year.

He practiced law in downtown Baltimore until 1938, when he was named an assistant state's attorney. He was promoted to first assistant state's attorney by his boss, the late J. Bernard Wells, who retired in 1950 and endorsed **Judge Sodaro** in the election that year to succeed him as state's attorney. **Judge Sodaro** won the job.

As the city's top prosecutor, **Judge Sodaro** headed the state's trial team in a sensational 1952 case in which metals company executive G. Edward Grammer killed his wife, Dorothy May Grammer, then staged an accident with a Chrysler sedan to make it appear that she had been operating the car, which he rigged to careen down the Taylor Avenue hill near Belair Road.

Mr. Grammer's botched execution was Maryland's last hanging. The executioner failed to place the rope correctly, and the death took nearly 20 minutes. That led to replacement of the gallows with the gas chamber as Maryland's means of capital punishment.

In 1998, the Maryland State Bar Association established the **Judge Anselm Sodaro** Judicial Civility Award, which is awarded annually to a Maryland **judge** who demonstrates the "patience, courtesy, civility and judicial temperament" shown by **Judge Sodaro** over the years.

A Mass of Christian burial will be offered at 10:30 a.m. tomorrow at Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church, Baltimore and Ware avenues in Towson.

Judge Sodaro is survived by his wife of 17 years, the former Mildred Britt Glass; three daughters, Stephanie **Sodaro** Esworthy of Timonium, and Susanne **Sodaro** and Christine **Sodaro**, both of Baltimore; and two grandchildren. His first wife, the former Ella Quotadamo, whom he married in 1938, died in 1962.

GRAPHIC: Photo(s), As city state's attorney, **Anselm Sodaro** got national attention for winning a conviction in the Grammer murder case in 1952.

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